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# Juvenile delinquency: A comparative analysis between divorced and married homes

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*Eastern Illinois University*

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Juvenile Delinquency: A Comparative Analysis Between

Divorced and Married Homes

(TITLE)

BY

Cristina R. Prestin-Latham

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science

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CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research was to determine if children being raised in divorced homes are more likely to be juvenile delinquents than children being raised in married homes. Additionally, this study sought to determine if the age of the child during the divorce further contributes to the likelihood of delinquent behavior. The majority of previous studies indicate children from divorced homes are more prone to juvenile delinquency than children from married homes. The sample in this study consisted of 544 participants. Using a self-reporting, anonymous questionnaire, participants were asked questions about their childhood home structure and their adolescent delinquent activity. The results of this study indicated children from divorced homes have higher level of delinquency rates. It was also determined the age at the time of parental divorce was not a factor in determining the level of delinquency.

### **Dedication**

For my daughters, Carleigh and Camryn...don't let statistics ever stand in your way.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank the following individuals for their support and contributions to this study:

Dr. Richard Wilkinson, my thesis advisor, for his diligence with this project and amazing guidance. This study could not have been completed as effectively or promptly without him. I will always be grateful to him for his patience and dedication, as an instructor and advisor.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Over the past few decades there have been dramatic changes in the way families are structured. Price and Kunz (2003) estimated that approximately 50% of marriages end in divorce. The United States Census Bureau (2012) confirmed Price and Kunz's estimate. Marriage and divorce rates for 1990, 2000, and 2009 were compiled. Statistics consistently showed divorce rates were nearly half the rate of marriage. While divorce rates in the United States are steadily on the rise, every year more children are raised in "broken" homes. Over the past few decades, research has shown children of divorced homes are more likely to exhibit negative behaviors, including juvenile and adolescent delinquency. Whether or not the negative behaviors are truly caused from the divorce has not been determined. Divorce and the aftermath are life altering for all members of the household. Events leading up to the legal dissolution of marriage can be just as destructive. Despite the fact that divorce is not as socially shunned as it was in the past, the statistics involving its detrimental effect on children have remained steady.

Price and Kunz (2003) found the following:

With divorce rates so high, some might argue that broken homes have become the norm of our society, or that at least the negative attitudes and stigma associated with divorce have decreased significantly and it is now more socially acceptable. However, the issue of whether or not the increased number of homes split by divorce has caused an increase in juvenile delinquency is worthy of debate. (p. 110)

**Purpose of Research**

There have been numerous studies conducted to determine if growing up in a divorced home has negative impacts on the child. The majority of studies concur that children from divorced homes are more susceptible to negative behaviors, including juvenile and adolescent delinquency. The purpose of this particular study was to determine if children from divorced homes are more likely to be juvenile delinquents than children from married homes. Additionally, this study determined if the age of the child at the time of the divorce further impacts the likelihood of being a juvenile delinquent.

Furthermore, this study examined developmental and social theories with regard to child development and psychological well-being. Prior research and theories developed by Erikson and Kohlberg are used to provide a theoretical base for child behavior, development, and adaptability to their change in home structure. The findings of Erikson and Kohlberg differ slightly, although both theories consist of multiple stages which individuals pass through, during an entire life time. Their work confirms that changes in family structure during particular phases of development can cause permanent damage to children and have effects into adulthood.

**Benefits of Research**

The primary purpose of this study was to determine if children from divorced homes are more prone to juvenile delinquent behaviors. Families, educators and psychosocial professionals will benefit from this research. Researchers can further examine the cause of delinquency and the negative connotations with being from a

divorced home. As divorce rates and juvenile delinquency rates continue to rise across the United States, it is important to determine if divorce and delinquency are directly related. It is imperative that psychosocial professionals, educators, law enforcement officers, the judicial system, and families take into consideration the structure of the home and the stressors it can place on children. Not only do researchers need to examine the acts of delinquency themselves, but the reasoning behind the behavior. The more knowledge researchers are able to gain from this study, the more the research can help children and potentially deter delinquent behavior. By gaining a better understanding of juvenile delinquency and its relationship with childhood home structure, society is better equipped for assisting these children with mental, cognitive and behavioral disorders.

### **Research Questions**

This study answered the following two research questions.

1. Is there a difference in juvenile delinquency rates between divorced and married homes?
2. For children from divorced homes, is there a relationship between the age of the child at the time of the divorce and juvenile delinquency rates?

### **Type of Study**

This was a quantitative causal comparative study. Participants completed an online, self-reported questionnaire. The questionnaire included items pertaining to demographics, childhood home structure, and juvenile delinquency. All participants remained completely anonymous.

## **Assumptions and Limitations**

Due to the type of data collection (self-reporting), the researcher assumed all participants were accurate and honest with their answers. The researcher strived to obtain enough participants to have a diverse group, but the data may not be able to represent the general population. The ability for participants to recall events accurately could be an additional limitation.

## **Definitions of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were used.

1. adolescent: growing into manhood or womanhood; youthful (Adolescent, 2013)
2. divorce: a judicial declaration dissolving a marriage (Divorce, 2013)
3. juvenile delinquency: In this study juvenile delinquency includes acts of violence, theft, vandalism, alcohol consumption, illegal drug use and underage tobacco use.
4. juvenile delinquent: a minor who cannot be controlled by parental authority and commits antisocial or criminal acts (Juvenile delinquent, 2013)
5. minor: under the legal age of full responsibility (Minor, 2013)

For this study, the level of juvenile delinquency was determined based on how many deviant acts are reported and a Likert scale for self-determining participants' own level of deviancy.

**Summary**

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the purpose, benefits, research questions, and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 provides a literature review that includes the topics of children of divorce, juvenile delinquency, developmental and social theories, role of age, role of gender, and the role of family structure.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between children raised in divorced homes and juvenile delinquency. Various researchers have studied children raised in single parent homes and the likelihood of them participating in negative behaviors. Additionally, children living in the home during parental divorce are subjected to more family stressors than an intact family. It is theorized that these family stressors and potentially strained relationships can cause children and adolescents to act negatively, thus resulting in illegal activity. This study examined multiple aspects of delinquency, as delinquency can include numerous illegal actions. In this study juvenile delinquency included acts of violence, theft, vandalism, alcohol consumption, illegal drug use and underage tobacco use. The topics summarized in the review are children of divorce, juvenile delinquency, developmental and social theories, role of age, role of gender, and role of family structure.

#### **Children of Divorce**

Over the past few decades the number of marriages resulting in divorce have steadily increased. Numerous reasons for divorce have been examined. As times change and society evolves, individuals no longer stay married for the sake of the children. Naturally, the rise in divorce rates also means more children are being raised in single-parent homes. Goetting (1981) stated that 37% of marriages will end in divorce and over one million children annually will be affected. It was estimated that two-thirds of marriages would end in divorce by the nineties (Martin & Bumpass, 1989). The U.S. Census Bureau reports that between 1970 and 1996, children living with only one parent

grew from 12% to 28%. According to McLanahan and Sandefur (1994), over half of America's children will spend part of their childhood in a single-parent home. For many years, divorced homes have been deemed as "broken" and, depending on the study, less desirable to raise children in. Mental health professionals and media portray homes of divorce as "flawed structures and environments" (Hartman, 2011, p. 93). Single parent homes are labeled negatively, scrutinized for lack of parental involvement, low levels of parental monitoring and no proper boundaries set.

Price and Kunz's (2003) study stated the following:

One of the major functions of the family is to protect, teach, and train children so that they become competent, productive adults. When a family is disrupted by divorce and children become delinquent, it is often assumed that the family has failed to do its job. (p. 110)

The review of literature indicates that the majority of researchers agree acts of juvenile delinquency are more likely to occur by children of single parent homes.

Comer's *Abnormal Psychology* (6<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007) states that behavior disorders are linked to multiple environmental and biological factors. Two of the most prevalent are troubled parent-child relationships and when a parent leaves the home. If the household has precipitating factors prior to the divorce including hostility, alcohol abuse or violence this can also increase the likelihood of conduct disorder and juvenile delinquency. Stressful life events, such as parental divorce, are some of the leading predictors of future drug and alcohol problems in all ages. "Dysfunctional marital relationships can have deleterious

effects on the teenage children of such unions. Adolescent alcohol or drug abuse is one of the negative consequences of problems between parents” (Thombs, 1999, p.192).

Is divorce really to blame for children and adolescents having behavioral problems resulting in juvenile delinquency? Amato and Keith (1991) determined parental divorce does put children and adolescents at greater risk of antisocial and delinquent behavior. In fact, Amato and Keith feel divorce is a “predictor” of delinquent behaviors. Additionally, they found the time of divorce usually marks the beginning of juvenile rebellion and issues. Amato and Keith also concluded juveniles witnessing post-divorce conflict with their parents are more likely to become delinquent. Demuth and Brown (2004) concluded that adolescents living with one parent were more likely to be delinquent. Their research further explored the idea of delinquency resulting from lack of parental control in a single parent setting. Less parental monitoring and parental involvement created an environment where adolescents were able to have more freedom and behave in negative manners. While Demuth and Brown’s research does conclude single parents’ homes create significantly higher levels of delinquent adolescents, the actual divorce does not appear to be the primary cause. In 1999, The Texas Youth Authority reported that three out of four adolescents placed in state correctional facilities were from single parent homes (Demuth & Brown, 2004). These homes are not specifically limited to divorce; parents never marrying and separation were other variables.

Research differs on which gender leading a single parent household is more likely to contribute to creating juvenile delinquents. Schroder, Osgood and Oghia (2010) reported that “single-father headed households show significantly higher rates of juvenile

crime than single-mother headed households. Further, children from blended families tend to be the most delinquent of any family structure” (p. 581). To the contrary, Demuth and Brown (2004) determined single-parent homes to be the most detrimental for adolescent delinquency even more so than blended (step) families.

### **Juvenile Delinquency**

In the past couple of decades, while divorce rates have been on the rise, so have rates of crime involving minors. Ellickson and McGuigan (2000) reported in a five year time period, between 1985 and 1990, arrests for adolescent violent crimes increased by 60%. Such crimes include murder, manslaughter and aggravated assault; all committed by minors under the age of 18. In some case studies, the age the child started showing signs of deviant behavior and gender were predictors of future violent criminal activity. The sample from this particular study included nuclear families. Although over half the participants came from intact families (64%), the statistics reported for crimes of predatory violence were significantly linked to adolescents of nuclear families.

Price and Kunz (2003) studied the correlation between children of divorced homes and juvenile delinquency. With the exception of alcohol abuse, their results indicated children from divorced homes had higher delinquency rates. While many studies have confirmed delinquency rates are higher with children of divorce, this study addressed an additional issue: the judicial system. “Research has shown that the juvenile justice system may actually be more willing to process children from divorced homes through the system than children from intact homes” (Price & Kunz, 2003, p. 127). Researchers feel with the urge to get tougher on crime, children of low income and

potentially single parent homes are suffering. Consequently, single parent low income homes are unable to pay high legal fees to have the delinquent behaviors erased from the system. This raises the question of what law enforcement and judicial officials gain by making an example of these families. Divorce rates have increased and it is more accepted for adults in society, yet the children are still scrutinized. Goetting (1981) reported there was not a difference between single and dual parent families of the same economic status, with regard to level of delinquency.

### **Developmental and Social Theories**

Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development can be examined with regard to juvenile delinquent behaviors and the reasoning behind it. Erikson has eight stages of psychosocial development throughout the lifespan. Erikson believed all individuals will pass through every phase, assuming they live long enough. Childhood is broken into four phases, going thru age 11. "The outcome of the crisis at each of these four childhood stages depends on other people...psychosocial development remains mostly under the influence of parents and teachers" (Schultz & Schultz, 2001, p. 218-219). The development of a child's crisis coping mechanism is largely dependent on their parents. The role of family and family structure is very important in contributing to the successful psychosocial development of children and adolescents. During the period of adolescence, defined by Erikson as ages 12-18, youth are searching for their own identity. If the family structure is disrupted during this time, it is increasingly difficult for youth to determine who they are. According to Erikson, adolescents are dealing with identity versus role confusion. This can be further complicated for families dealing with restructure and divorce. "Erikson was concerned with the problem facing parents in our changing

society” (Crain, 2005, p. 300). Erikson further hoped parents would be able to realize the differences between children and adults, with regard to thought processes, dealing with stressful situations and coping mechanisms. This is important when handling the emotions and maturity level of children during parental divorce. Subsequently, children cannot always be held solely responsible for their actions, including delinquent behavior.

Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development consists of six stages. His initial work related closely with Piaget, which ended with four stages. Each stage defined by Kohlberg deals with how individuals handle their interactions with others. Stage 1 and 2 are typically defined as children, stage three are entering adolescence. Stage 2 and 3 are the ages of most youth living at home during the time of parental divorce. Depending on the child’s moral development level, they are processing and handling the family restructure in different ways. “Kohlberg’s scale has more to do with moral thinking, not moral action” (Crain, 2005, p. 166). While he did not expect everyone to use moral judgment and action consecutively, there is a correlation. Oftentimes juvenile delinquents are aware their actions are wrong (moral judgment), but do not stop themselves from committing the crime (moral action). Stage 3 also deals with the formation of good relationships with peers and family. This stage can be impacted if the family is facing restructuring or a parent has left the home. It is not until stage 4 that individuals are concerned with respecting others and obeying laws. Therefore, it is justifiable that if a person does not have successful development during stage 3, their actions in stage 4 could be negative; thus resulting in delinquent behavior. Both Erikson and Kohlberg’s theories were developed decades ago. Since their initial development, divorce rates have been on the rise and juvenile delinquency has grown in our society.

The structure of family and the roles of family members have changed dramatically in the past couple of decades. More children are being raised in divorced, single parent, blended, and same sex parent homes, than prior generations. As families continue to change due to divorce, the social and psychological development of children will be affected.

Social Disorganization Theory, developed by Shaw and McKay (1942) is based on the premise that changes in society create crime and delinquency. “Juvenile delinquency is considered one of the most serious and challenging problems worldwide” (Alanezi, 2010, p. 68). Based on that assumption, researchers must examine global divorce rates to determine if single family homes are correlated with juvenile delinquency. Depending on ethnic and cultural beliefs, divorce may not be an option. Does this mean countries that do not allow divorce have lower rates of juvenile delinquency? Additional studies suggest societal changes, including modernization and urbanization, are to blame for the rise in delinquent juvenile activity. “One cannot simply conclude that the result of a child being from a divorced family is the only or leading factor in predicting delinquency” (Price & Kunz, 2003, p. 127).

A study conducted in Finland, specifically on adolescent males, showed results consistent with higher rates of juvenile delinquency in divorced homes. Delinquent activities included drug use, acts of violence, property damage, traffic violations and drunk driving. Researchers concluded “as expected, parents’ divorce was one of the most central correlates of offending, being uniquely related to all crime types. The risk may, however, stem from family adversities rather than divorce” (Elonheimo, Sourander, Niemela & Helenius, 2011, p. 910).

## **Role of Age**

Another issue to examine with regard to divorced homes and juvenile delinquency is the age of the child during the time of the divorce. Developmental theorists have determined children are more susceptible to behavioral problems during certain ages and periods of development. Therefore, depending on the age of the child, a change in home structure could have a more severe impact on behavior. For example, a child whose parents divorced when they were an infant will have no recollection of their parents' marriage. Despite their young age at the time of the family restructure, the infant is the child of divorced home. It is inaccurate to conclude divorce is the only form of family restructure that can contribute to juvenile delinquency. Other changes in structure such as remarriage, death of a parent and cohabitation could be additional factors in determining the likelihood of delinquent behavior. Most literature agrees that younger children are more impacted by divorce; this was confirmed by Price and Kunz (2003).

Burt, Barnes, McGue and Iacono (2008) reported that although society has been more accepting of divorce in the past couple of decades, the acceptance has not caused a decline in negative behaviors. Burt et al. determined juvenile delinquency is not a result of genetics. Although delinquency was not proven to be in genetic makeup, individuals are all the creation of biological and environmental factors. The study confirmed children from divorced homes were more likely to demonstrate delinquent behaviors. The child's age at the time of the divorce did not have an impact on determining future delinquency. This study concluded that remarriage can have a negative impact and cause additional behavioral problems, including juvenile delinquency.



Adolescence has been deemed a time of rebellion and defiance by society for decades. The steady rise in divorce rates over a few decades is being unjustly blamed for many negative societal factors. Arguably, there are children being raised in homes with both biological parents who are juvenile delinquents. In order to fully determine if children and adolescents from divorced homes are more likely to participate in acts of delinquency, researchers must also examine statistics of juvenile offenders from intact homes. "North American research on adolescents in general has historically depicted adolescence as a problematic life stage" (Hartman, 2011, p. 94). Additionally, the majority of divorce related research reports negative consequences for children. Due to the unfavorable stigmas attached to parental divorce and adolescence, as separate events in life, it is presumed the combination of the two could have a severely negative outcome.

Recent studies have shown an increase in tobacco and alcohol use by adolescents from divorced homes. The reason for the use is correlated to level of stress in the home, depression and lack of parental monitoring. Unfortunately, other studies indicate the use of tobacco products and alcohol at young ages can increase the chances of addiction later in life. According to Kristjansson, Sigfusdottir, Allegrante and Helgasson (2009), the chances of being a smoker in adulthood are greater for children of divorce. Kristjansson et al. also examined the stressors in the home, pre and post-divorce, that contributed to adolescents experimenting with drinking and smoking. The most common complaints were arguments and physical violence with their parents. Divorce leads to one adult leaving the home, but events building up to the event can be equally detrimental. Adolescents, regardless of family structure, have been known to experiment with smoking tobacco and consuming alcohol.

## **Role of Gender**

Another compelling aspect of juveniles dealing with parental divorce is gender. Research shows boys tend to lash out and externalize their feelings, while girls are more likely to internalize. Doherty and Needle (1991) studied the correlation between adolescent drug abuse and parental divorce. Their research showed girls engaged in negative behaviors (use of drugs) prior to the actual divorce. Boys reported higher levels of drug use post divorce. While the timing of the drug abuse varied, the study confirmed higher rates of drug use in adolescents from divorced homes, than from married families.

McKnight and Loper (2002) focused on the delinquency problems in adolescent girls. Contrary to other research that indicates girls internalize their problems and are less likely to have negative behaviors, McKnight and Loper concluded the rate of crimes committed by adolescent girls has dramatically risen. They blame the rise in female adolescent delinquency on numerous factors, including (but not limited to) “family break-up and single parent households” (p. 187). Their research determined a statistical significance for single parent adolescent girls to be at risk for delinquency. “Indirect evidence of official intervention has shown that school and justice officials perceive the daughters of single mothers to be in greater need of their intervention” (Price & Kunz, 2003, p.111).

## **Role of Family Structure**

Many researchers concur it is not the divorce itself which directly causes acts of juvenile delinquency. The issue at hand is more a matter of parent involvement and communication with children and adolescents following the divorce. Divorce can be a

damaging and life altering event for parents and children. As mentioned by many researchers, including Kristjansson et al. (2009), the relationship parents have with their adolescents prior to the divorce plays a major factor. Parents, educators and professionals need to be aware of the emotional impact divorce can have on children and adolescents. Every child reacts to life changes and stressors in different ways. Statistically, children and adolescents from divorced homes are more likely to experience delinquency and substance abuse issues. This can potentially be avoided with positive parent interaction and an open line of communication.

Esmacili and Yaacob's (2011) study found the following:

Children's age of at the time of parental divorce, children's gender, and length of parental divorce, parental education and employment status, social and emotional support from family and friends, and coping skills may also moderate the link between parental divorce and adolescent adjustment . (p. 34)

Heckel and Mandell (1981) listed various factors causing the delinquent behaviors of males and females. "Broken homes, divorce, lack of closeness to parents, conflicts with parents" (p. 429) were all listed as contributing factors, but not necessarily correlated. This implies a home can be broken, without being divorced. Juveniles can lack parental closeness in a home that has two parents. Conflicts between parents and adolescents happen regardless of dual or single parent status. Additionally, this study, which is over 30 years old, reports that less than 5% of incarcerated juveniles were convicted of violent crimes; and the parents of the incarcerated juvenile had an average

education level of merely ninth grade. Divorce rates have steadily risen, but so have the level of children being raised in cohabitation and permanent single parent settings.

### **Summary**

For over 100 years, the impact of divorce on children has been studied. Over the past century, despite all the studies and statistics, there are still very few answers. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012), in a state-by-state report analyzing the years 1990 thru 2011, shows divorce rates have remained steady. Consequently, the number of marriages has declined from 1990 to 2009, according to the United States Census Bureau (2012). Thus reaffirming divorce is still a prominent issue in our society. The impact of divorce has been detrimental to the families involved and society as a whole. For decades the children of divorce have been branded by society as damaged goods, suffering from behavioral, emotional and cognitive dysfunctions. While divorce may play a role in the demise of some children, thus creating some of society's juvenile delinquents, it is unfair to stereotype all children of divorce. Many children are better off being raised with parents under separate roofs, rather than in a dual parent, unhealthy environment. "As long as parents persevere in their parenting, are warm and supportive, monitor the children, and are consistent in discipline, the risk for conduct problems is no greater than in two-parent families" (Price & Kunz, 2003, p.111).

This review of literature discussed six main topics: children of divorce, juvenile delinquency, developmental and social theories, role of age, role of gender, and role of family structure. This literature review provides evidence that there is a relationship between children of divorced homes and juvenile delinquency. Additionally, this

literature review concludes there is a relationship between family structure, parental involvement and juvenile delinquency. Furthermore, this literature review also provides evidence there are other contributing factors to juvenile and adolescent delinquent behaviors, not solely parental divorce. Therefore, it should not be concluded that divorce is the primary contributing factor to juvenile delinquency. Chapter 3 provides the methodology of the study.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this research was to determine if children raised in divorced homes were more likely to be juvenile delinquents than children raised in married homes. Additionally, it determined if the age of the child during the divorce further contributed to the likelihood of delinquent behavior.

### **Research Questions**

This study answered the following two research questions.

1. Is there a difference in juvenile delinquency rates between divorced and married homes?
2. For children from divorced homes, is there a relationship between the age of the child at the time of the divorce and juvenile delinquency rates?

### **Design of Study**

The methodology for this study was quantitative causal comparative. Responses from participants of divorced homes were compared to responses of participants from non-divorced homes. For research question #1, the independent variable was the primary structure of the childhood home (divorced or married). For research question #2, the independent variable was the age of the child at the time of the divorce. Both research questions had the same dependent variable, the participants' level of juvenile delinquency.

**Sample**

A minimum of 80-100 participants were desired for the study. Participants were recruited through random sampling, using Facebook and email as recruiting techniques. Participants varied in age, marital status, ethnicity and gender. All participants were at least 18 years of age. Although this study focused on the effects of parental divorce on juvenile delinquency, participants did not have to be from divorced homes. Data collected from all household structures was analyzed.

**Procedure for Data Collection**

The participants of this study completed a questionnaire designed by the researcher (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was available for participants to take online, via the Survey Monkey website ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)). Participants had to verify they were 18 years of age prior to beginning the questionnaire. All participants were anonymous. The questionnaire consisted of a demographics section, followed by questions regarding family structure as a child. Additional questions asked about encounters with juvenile delinquency. It was the goal of the researcher to receive 80-100 questionnaires completed online via the aforementioned methods. The survey remained available online for one week to achieve this goal. Social networking (Facebook) and Eastern Illinois University student email was used to recruit participants for the study. After approval from the IRB, an email was sent to all current students at Eastern Illinois University through their school email addresses. A posting was put on the researcher's Facebook page with a link to the survey.

## **Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed using quantitative methods. The data provided from the participants was entered into IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20 for statistical analysis. In order to determine if one household structure was more likely to have delinquent behaviors over the other, responses of participants from divorced homes and non-divorced homes were compared. The age range for delinquent behavior was also analyzed. The level of delinquency was measured by the total number of items checked in question #3. The numeric scores for question #3 were analyzed using an independent *t*-test. A correlation was used to determine if there is a relationship between the age of the child at the time of the divorce and juvenile delinquency rates.

## **Reliability and Validity**

The questionnaire was designed by the researcher and had not been used previously. An expert panel reviewed it for content validity. Participants were asked to recall events in childhood, but only the occurrence of such events, not specific details.

## **Summary**

The methodology chapter has given an overview of the design, sample, procedure for data collection, and data analysis. It was expected the results from the questionnaire used for this study would provide results contributive to whether children from divorced homes are more likely to be involved in juvenile delinquency. Additionally, it examined if the age of the child during parental divorce further impacts delinquent behaviors. Chapter 4 will analyze and discuss the results obtained from this study.



## Chapter 4

### Results

The purpose of this study was to determine if children being raised in divorced homes are more likely to be juvenile delinquents than children being raised in married homes. Additionally, it sought to determine if the age of the child during the divorce further contributes to the likelihood of delinquent behavior.

### Sample

Five hundred forty-four participants completed an anonymous, online questionnaire created by the researcher (see Appendix A). An additional participant failed to enter their age correctly and their data was not included in the analysis. Participants were recruited through Facebook and their university student email. The email was sent to all graduate and undergraduate students. The questionnaire was available for one week. The majority of the respondents were single (56.8%), Caucasian (87.5%) females (77.6%). Participants' age ranged from 18-72, with the majority in their 20's and 30's ( $M = 30.90$ ;  $SD = 11.31$ ). The majority of participants spent most of their childhood in married homes (71%). Other home structures included divorced homes (24%), and single-parent, living with grandparent, never married or deceased parent (5%). Two hundred and one participants experienced parental divorce. The ages of participants at the time of parental divorce ranged from 1-25 ( $M = 9.03$ ;  $SD = 6.17$ ). The majority of participants that experienced parental divorce resided in the home during the divorce (89%) and were under the age of 10. The complete demographics of the sample are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Sample Demographics*  
 (N = 544)

Demographic	Participants
Sex	
Female	77.6%
Male	22.4%
Ethnicity	
Caucasian	87.5%
African-American	7.2%
Multi-Racial	2.4%
Hispanic/Latino	1.7%
Asian	.7%
Other	.6%
Current Marital Status	
Single	56.8%
Married	36.6%
Divorced	6.6%
Primary Childhood Structure	
Married Home	71.0%
Divorced Home	24.0%
Other	5.0%
Parents Divorced	
Yes	36.9%
No	63.1%
Reside in Home During Parental Divorce	
Yes	89.0%
No	11.0%

### **Disclosure of Delinquent Activity**

The participants were asked to disclose all delinquent activities that they had participated in during adolescence. If the delinquent activity was not provided on the list, they were asked to write it in under “other”. The responses are displayed in Table 2. The most common delinquent behaviors reported were underage alcohol and tobacco use, curfew violation and drug use.

Table 2  
*Sample's Juvenile Delinquent Behaviors (N = 544)*

Type of Delinquency	Participants Admitted to Behavior
Underage Alcohol Consumption	54.2%
Underage Tobacco Use	36.9%
Curfew Violation	31.3%
Illegal Drug Use	25.4%
Motor Vehicle Violations	16.9%
Theft	15.1%
Vandalism	9.0%
Property Damage	7.0%
Illegal Drug Distribution	4.4%
Assault	1.3%
Arson	0.9%
Burglary	0.7%
Other	0.7%
Statutory Rape	0.4%
Concealing a Weapon	0.2%
Attempted Murder/Manslaughter	0.0%
Murder/Manslaughter	0.0%

Note: Other provided by participants included: illegal protesting, breaking and entering, shop lifting and running away.

Lastly, participants were asked to rate their level of delinquency from their own perspective and from what they perceived to be the perspective of their parents (see Table 3). The most common response was that the participants believed their own behaviors to be mild, but they thought their parents believed that they had not engaged in any delinquent acts.

Table 3  
*Sample's Rating of Delinquency Levels (N = 544)*

Rating Level	Participants
Rating from Self Perspective	
None	41.7%
Mild	47.8%
Moderate	9.6%
Extreme	0.9%
Rating from Parental Perspective	
None	50.7%
Mild	31.4%
Moderate	14.2%
Extreme	3.7%

## Research Questions

The research questions in this study, and the results, are provided below.

1. Is there a difference in juvenile delinquency rates between divorced and married homes?

In order to determine the level of juvenile delinquency, participants were asked to indicate delinquent activities that they participated in as adolescents. Sixteen categories were provided and participants were able to write in any behaviors that were not listed on the questionnaire. (see Table 2). The level of delinquency was determined based on the total number of delinquent items checked by each participant. The mean and standard deviation for delinquency rates are shown in Table 4.

Table 4  
*Sample's Overall Delinquency Scores (N = 544)*

Parents Divorced	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Yes	201	2.44	2.30
No	343	1.81	2.09

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to analyze differences in delinquent acts between children of divorced homes and non-divorced homes. Levene's test ( $p = .037$ ) indicated that equal variances could not be assumed. A significant difference was found between the two groups,  $t(387) = 3.18, p = .002$ . Based on these findings, it appears that children from divorced homes have higher juvenile delinquency rates than children from married homes.

2. For children from divorced homes, is there a relationship between the age of the child at the time of the divorce and juvenile delinquency rates?

This study had 201 participants with divorced parents, but only 199 provided age information. The average age of the participants at the time of parental divorce in this study was 9.03 ( $SD = 6.17$ ). The average age reported for the beginning of illegal delinquent behavior was 15.87 ( $SD = 1.67$ ). Some participants entered an age range, in which case the youngest age provided was used for analysis.

A correlational test was used to determine the relationship between the age of the child at the time of the divorce and juvenile delinquency rates. The Pearson correlational test indicated that the age of the child at the time of the divorce and juvenile delinquency rates were not significantly related ( $p = .29$ ;  $r = -.08$ ). Therefore, in this sample there was not a relationship between a child's age at the time of parental divorce and their likelihood of engaging in delinquent acts.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 provided the results and discussion of the study. This study determined children from divorced homes had higher levels of juvenile delinquency than children from married homes. It also determined that the age of the child at the time of parental divorce did not have an impact on juvenile delinquency levels. Chapter 5 will provide a conclusion, benefits, limitations and recommendations for further research.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The majority of previous research indicates that children from divorced homes have a high chance of becoming juvenile delinquents. The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between children raised in divorced homes and juvenile delinquency. The results of this study indicated that the level of juvenile delinquent behavior is higher among children from divorced homes than children from homes where their parents were still married. Furthermore, the age of the child at the time of parental divorce did not lead to higher juvenile delinquency rates.

### **Conclusion**

The role of family structure and parenting is extremely important with regard to the healthy psychosocial development of children. The results of this study supported prior research provided in the review of literature. Home structure was related to creating/deterring juvenile delinquency. Results indicated that children from divorced homes committed more delinquent acts than children from married homes. Residing in a home that experienced parental divorce appears to affect juvenile delinquency, but the age of the child at the time of parental divorce did not matter in this particular study. The results of this study suggest that as divorce rates continue to increase, juvenile delinquency rates will also. The results of this thesis was consistent with the work of Price and Kunz (2003), which concluded that younger children are impacted more by divorce than older children. In the current study, the older the child was at the time of parental divorce, the fewer delinquent acts they reported.

When asked to rate their level of delinquency from their own perspective versus the perspective of their parents, the rates varied greatly. The majority of the sample (47.8%) rated their delinquency as mild. Subsequently, the majority of the sample rated their delinquency from what they perceived to be their parents' perspective as none (50.7%). This suggests that adolescents believe that parents are unaware of their child's activities, regardless of home structure. This also affirms the importance of a positive parent-child relationship, including communication, parental control and involvement. Regardless of the type of home structure, it is imperative that parents take an active role in interacting, supporting and protecting their children.

Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development indicated youth are searching for their identities during adolescence, defined as ages 12-18. The mean age in this study for delinquent behavior was 16. Erikson also affirmed the importance of family and family structure in positive psychosocial development. It is apparent from this study and prior studies, the importance of family structure in lowering delinquency rates, and raising children with respect for each other, laws and society as a whole.

Only 5.5% of the participants were arrested for their acts of juvenile delinquency. Upon review of Table 2, it is clear the delinquent behaviors/crimes are substantial and abundant. Many of the crimes should have resulted in probation and/or fines. On the contrary, research by Ellickson and McGuigan (2000) reported juvenile arrest rates had increased by 60% in a five year time period. Without police interaction and judicial enforcement, it is impossible to determine the amount of juvenile crime in our society. It is difficult to accurately measure juvenile crime rates, given that many times juveniles are neither caught nor arrested.

**Benefits**

This research was beneficial in multiple fields, including but not limited to, educators, psychosocial professionals, law enforcement and judicial officials, and families themselves. This study has reaffirmed the importance of family structure with regard to successfully raising children. The results of this study, and prior studies, indicate children from divorced homes are more likely to be involved in juvenile delinquency. Social service agencies can provide divorcing parents with information on how to deter delinquency within their homes and training on how to create a positive, healthy environment to raise children in. The circumstances leading to divorce (spousal abuse, infidelity, financial stress, alcoholism, drug addiction, child abuse, etc.) can have equally as devastating consequences for children, as the divorce itself. All aspects of family restructuring should be addressed for the psychological well-being of the entire family.

Juveniles and adolescents spend the majority of their time in school. Educators and school administrators are aware of home structure upon the enrollment of every student. It is important that teachers, guidance counselors and social workers are aware of the likelihood of delinquency in divorced homes. Additionally, this research can be used to prepare educational materials to teach children themselves about the importance of communication with their parents, and how to handle being a child in a divorced home. Depending on the age and learning style of each child, this could be through visual, auditory or kinesthetic methods.



## **Limitations**

This study was based on a self-reporting questionnaire. All data collected was based on the assumption participants' answered questions honestly and were able to recall information from their childhoods' accurately. The majority of the participants were female Caucasians. A broader range of ethnic groups and a higher number of male participants would be beneficial. Participants may have feared that disclosing their illegal activities, even though the questionnaire was anonymous. Additionally, it was up to the discretion of each participant to determine if their level of activity warranted disclosing it. Depending on the act, one violation may not indicate a delinquency problem and/or addiction. Participants may have had a difficult time defining married and divorced homes, due to the numerous types of family structures that exist.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

The literature review examined prior research regarding adolescent use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs. These are common behaviors of adolescent rebellion, especially in children from divorced homes. This study determined underage alcohol abuse was the highest delinquent activity in the sample (54.2%), followed by underage tobacco use (36.9%), and illegal drug use (25.4%). While these rates are not surprising, they are alarming. Adolescents are gaining access to illegal substances, thus possibly creating an epidemic in our society. Further information on why alcohol, tobacco and drugs are used as a stress relief and how they are obtained could assist in lowering these rates. This could be obtained through a qualitative study or an additional quantitative study.

As long as family structure continues to change, and juveniles are committing crimes, further investigation into the relationship or lack thereof, is important to social and behavioral sciences. The situation surrounding the demise of each marriage and the restructuring of each family are vastly different. Many marriages end due to irreconcilable differences or mental cruelty. Events leading to divorce may be rapid, or over the course of many years. Sixty-six percent of the sample reported that they had engaged in at least one delinquent activity. Nearly 15% of the sample reported 5 or more delinquent acts. A few participants, regardless of home structure (married or divorced), had very high levels of juvenile delinquency (9-10 acts). It would be beneficial to further examine the cause of such behaviors and more in-depth analyses of their home structures. Such research would benefit families, professionals and society. Therefore, it should not be concluded that divorce alone is the primary contributing factor to juvenile delinquency.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE**

## Effects of Parental Divorce on Juvenile and Adolescent Delinquency

The following survey has been created to assist in research for a master's thesis. The research is to determine if there is a difference in juvenile delinquency rates between divorced and married homes. The survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Please click the appropriate answer, or fill in the appropriate blank. There is minimal risk for participating in this study. Additional research in this area can benefit families, educators, and psychosocial professionals. Completion of this survey indicates voluntary consent to participate in this study. You may discontinue participation at any time. Your responses are anonymous and will be kept confidential.

If you have any questions regarding this research you may contact me at [crprestinlatha@eu.edu](mailto:crprestinlatha@eu.edu). You may also contact my thesis advisor, Dr. Rick Wilkinson, at [rwilkinson@eu.edu](mailto:rwilkinson@eu.edu). Thank you for your participation!

**\*1. You must be at least 18 years of age to complete this survey. Please confirm you are of age, before continuing.**

- ☐ I am 18 years of age or older
- ☐ I am under the age of 18

**\*2. Age**

**\*3. Sex**

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

**\*4. Ethnicity**

- ☐ African-American
- ☐ Caucasian
- ☐ Hispanic/Latino
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ American Indian
- ☐ Multi-Racial
- ☐ Other (please specify)

**\*5. Current Marital Status**

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Divorced

**Effects of Parental Divorce on Juvenile and Adolescent Delinquency**

**\*6. Please describe the home structure that you spent MOST of your childhood (ages birth to 18):**

☐ Married Home

☐ Divorced Home

Other (please specify)

**\*7. Were your parents divorced?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

**8. If so, were you living at home at the time of the divorce?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

**9. What was your age at the time of your parents' divorce?**



**Effects of Parental Divorce on Juvenile and Adolescent Delinquency**

**10. As an adolescent, did you participate in any of the following delinquent behaviors/activities? Please select ALL that apply.**

- ☐ Vandalism
- ☐ Theft
- ☐ Tobacco use
- ☐ Illegal drug use
- ☐ Illegal drug distribution
- ☐ Underage alcohol consumption
- ☐ Burglary
- ☐ Attempted murder/manslaughter
- ☐ Arson
- ☐ Statutory rape
- ☐ Property damage
- ☐ Curfew violation
- ☐ Assault
- ☐ Concealing a weapon
- ☐ Motor vehicle violations
- ☐ Murder/Manslaughter

Other (please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

**\*11. Were you ever arrested as a juvenile for acts of delinquency?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**12. At what age did the MAJORITY of your delinquent activities occur?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**\*13. Please select how YOU would rate your level of delinquent activities as a juvenile. Please select only one answer.**

- ☐ None
- ☐ Mild
- ☐ Moderate
- ☐ Extreme

**Effects of Parental Divorce on Juvenile and Adolescent Delinquency**

**\* 14. Please select how your PARENTS would rate your level of delinquent activities as a juvenile. Please select only one answer.**

- ☐ None
- ☐ Mild
- ☐ Moderate
- ☐ Extreme

**APPENDIX B****APPROVAL FROM INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)**

May 30, 2013

Cristina Prestin-Latham

Family & Consumer Sciences

Thank you for submitting the research protocol titled, "Juvenile Delinquency: A Comparative Analysis Between Divorced and Married Homes" for review by the Eastern Illinois University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has reviewed this research protocol and effective 5/29/2013, has certified this protocol meets the federal regulations exemption criteria for human subjects research. The protocol has been given the IRB number 13-099. You are approved to proceed with your study.

The classification of this protocol as exempt is valid only for the research activities and subjects described in the above named protocol. IRB policy requires that any proposed changes to this protocol must be reported to, and approved by, the IRB before being implemented. You are also required to inform the IRB immediately of any problems encountered that could adversely affect the health or welfare of the subjects in this study. Please contact me, or the Compliance Coordinator at 581-8576, in the event of an emergency. All correspondence should be sent to:

Institutional Review Board

c/o Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

Telephone: 217-581-8576

Fax: 217-581-7181

Email: [eiuirb@www.eiu.edu](mailto:eiuirb@www.eiu.edu)

Thank you for your cooperation, and the best of success with your research.

Richard Cavanaugh, Chairperson

Institutional Review Board

Telephone: 217-581-6205

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